



Wantage

Methodist Church



Away Day @ Home

Saturday 20th January 2018.

Report and feedback.

Why did we have this day in the first place?

It was decided to have our "Away day @ Home" to help us look to the future, to seek and discern God's will for us as a church and as individuals as a response to the challenge that came from both the Methodist Conference and our Circuit Leadership team via the Circuit Meeting.

Our CLT had already started on that very same process for the Circuit as a whole, planning for long-term, viable ministry and looking at new and innovative ways of being and doing church in an age that is so very different to that in which our churches were founded and built.

The same challenge comes to us from the Methodist Conference who recently encouraged every Church Council to annually address and answer the question 'do you have a growth plan or an end of life plan?' This is in the light of the report that the Methodist Church in Britain had a 3.5% year-on-year decline in membership over the past decade, with membership now at 188,000.

"What are the challenges and changes facing our community? What is each church and circuit's plan for responding to the urgent call on the Methodist people to share the love of God in Jesus Christ in word and action? How might we listen more carefully to the promptings of the Spirit, day by day?" is what they are asking of us.

The Circuit Meeting unanimously agreed to support these challenges. Consequently, the Circuit Meeting is asking all of our churches to look closely at what they do, who they are, their priorities and where they see themselves in the next three to five years.

How each individual church does this, is up to them. Our Away day @ home is part of our response to these challenges and we were delighted that 50 people of all ages turned up and took part.

It was great day of sharing, talking, discussing, listening, worshipping, eating, dreaming and imagining. There was a real buzz about the place and a very positive atmosphere with everyone wanting to engage with these issues and see us move forward.

The rest of this report is a summary of what happened on the day. We hope this document will enable you to continue thinking, praying and wondering about the future and what we are being called by God to be.

We will continue our thinking during our General Church Meeting and in the months to follow. This report is but a beginning rather than an end!

Written reports that detail what each church has done, along with their findings and proposals, will be sent to the CLT by the end of June 2018.

If you have any other comments, suggestions or thoughts, please let us know.

With love and God Bless from Keith and the Church Stewards.

Feedback from the children's sessions

We are very grateful to Deacon Selina Nisbett, Rosemary, Jackie and Jo for putting together and such imaginative sessions for our children. A summary of the conversations is below

Four aspects of church life were identified by the young people. In order, they were:
Worship (sprang immediately to mind)
Prayer/Listening to God
Church family
Helping others

Worship:

They liked this to be happy & relaxed
They talked very positively about Junior Church - lots of fun activities, they clearly thought of this as worship
Singing was seen as a major part of worship - again, cheerful songs preferred, they liked the music group
They welcomed the variety of styles with different ministers.
Regarding the first part of services (with the adults): this was the only time they seemed negative - they found it hard & felt marginalized and would like it to be more understandable, more interesting/active/fun.

Prayers:

they found it hard to identify with formal prayer - language difficult, concentration hard
they preferred prayers that left space for them to add their own prayers
prayer Spaces were relaxing
could the idea of active prayers they'd seen in Prayer Spaces be used in church?

Listening to God:

They prayed at home & they talked about when/where/how they met God
At night/if upset
In bedroom - feeling cosy & safe reminded them of God's love ("my teddies are like God")
We can get too busy & forget to listen to God

Church family:

They found it easy to talk with church adults & clearly felt part of a family that respected them
They saw helping each other as an important part of church life
Key-words were comforting, celebrating, sharing - important to share good times too

Helping others: ("spreading happiness")

They had little awareness of how the church helped others & wanted to be more actively involved

They could make & send cards to people in the church family

They wanted to raise funds for overseas charities by making/selling cakes or holding

Bring & Buys

They would like to help people in Wantage somehow

They wanted people outside to see church as fun, interesting & full of love.

“What’s in the pot?” - a summary.

The first thing we sought to do on the day was to give thanks for and to value all those things we saw as being important to us. We were encouraged to make write down those things we valued, appreciated and saw as being our strengths and to ‘put them into a pot’ or as on the day, a plastic box!

Revd. Helen Cameron our District Chair, recently spoke of the need to, “Value what we have, treasure what we have already been given, and not just long for what we haven’t”

Please find below a list of all the good things that people at WMC appreciate and see as being our strengths - the numbers in brackets represent the number of times mentioned

US AS A CONGREGATION

Pastoral Care/Fellowship/Friendship etc (39)

Welcome (18)

Accepting/Non-judgemental (10)

People (7)

Diversity in people and of experience (4)

Good leadership (4)

Openness to all (4)

No pressure (4)

Wanting do something new (2)

Capable volunteers (2)

Our Minister (2)

No animosity (1)

New People coming (1)

Outward Looking (1)

CHILDREN & YOUTH WORK

Kids@Church (9)

YMOSES (7)

Junior Church (3)

Creche (1)

Accepting of children (1)

Children involved in services (1)

Minister supporting children’s work (1)

MISSION, MINISTRY & OUTREACH

Church Lunches (Food Ministry!) (15)

Community involvement e.g. street pastors, food bank etc (8)

Community Use (4)

Wednesday Fellowship (3)

Knitted Christmas Angels (2)

WORSHIP, PRAYER & STUDY

Worship - variety and quality (12)

Musicians and variety of styles (4)

Local Preachers (2)

Monthly Bible Study (2)

Prayer Support (2)

Bible study group (1)

Holy Communion - everyone welcome (1)

Methodist Tradition (1)

BUILDING & FINANCE

Building/premises/Re-furbished Chapel (16)

Financially secure (3)

OTHER

Use of IT (2)

Church website (1)

“Postcards from the future” - a summary.

In our second session, we spent time looking at our hopes and dreams for the future and asking what kind of church do we want to be? What kind of church is God calling us to be and what might that look like?

We then encouraged one another to write postcards to someone who had moved out of the area to update them on what was happening at Wantage Methodist Church, but that these postcards should be sent from the future - in fact, three years on from this Away day @ home!

A summary of the responses can be found below.

US AS A CONGREGATION

There were 13 responses along the lines of church membership increasing, size of the congregation growing, more people/new people coming along, an increase in the number of those between 50-60 years old and the average age of the congregation going down and not up! etc.

CHILDREN & YOUTH WORK

There were 20 responses in this category that spoke enthusiastically about the growth of the number of children and young people at church. Ideas mentioned were about building on the great work of Junior Church, YMOSES, Kids @Church (now weekly or at least fortnightly!), more young families, a thriving youth group/club (on a Friday night?), more young adult helpers etc.

MISSION, MINISTRY & OUTREACH

- *There were lots of ideas about the way that we could build on our work in the community as well as new initiatives.*
- *The church to be a hub/centre for the community (16) to include things like money/debt advice, support for those in need, and those who are lonely - food (church lunches twice during the week) English lessons, advice, support for those with dementia and their carers, meeting people where they are etc.*
- *Joining in with local events (4) especially the Dickensian evening - also Summer festival*
- *The need for our presence to be better known (3) especially through advertising, publicity etc.*
- *More street pastors from our Church (2)*
- *Build on success of Christmas knitted angels (2)*
- *Rambling Club (2)*
- *Weekly Coffee morning (1)*
- *Employ an outreach worker (1)*
- *Reaching out to the new housing development(s) with lessons learnt from GWP (1)*

- *To become a restaurant employing disadvantaged people and encouraging other churches to follow suit (1)*
- *Social events (1)*
- *Finding out what gaps there are and then helping to fill them (1)*
- *Church involvement in RE in local schools (1)*
- *Home work club after school on church premises (1)*
- *Toddler Group (1)*
- *Monthly Curry club (1)*
- *Singing group for older people (1)*
- *Book Group/Club (1)*
- *Film group/club (1)*
- *Music festivals (1)*
- *Badminton Club (1)*
- *Young people come to watch films (1)*

WORSHIP, PRAYER & STUDY

- *More Bible study groups/discussion groups etc (5) including an evening one for those who work*
- *Wednesday fellowship growing (2) - advertising in residential homes etc*
- *More/thriving prayer groups (2)*
- *Establish a church choir (2)*
- *Young adults group to explore faith etc (1)*
- *Team of worship leaders (1)*
- *Monthly praise service (1)*
- *Midweek informal worship service (1)*
- *Two morning services every Sunday morning at 9:00am and 10:30am (1)*
- *Services for those with dementia and their carers (1)*

BUILDING & FINANCE

- *Acoustic and sound issues fixed (2)*
- *A cross on the wall where the organ used to be (above the projection area) (2)*
- *Greater involvement of IT in worship (1)*
- *Purchase of a Church minibus (1)*

OTHER

- *We are not giving up (1)*
- *To be a place of “sticky Faith” (1)*
- *Outward looking - an antidote to the inward looking and insular views of Brexit and Trump (1)*

“What next?” - A Summary

In this last session we shared in groups and then with everyone some of the things we thought we ought to consider as next steps - these were then written down on a flip chart. The comments and suggestions can be seen below.

- *We need a publicity officer*
- *Decide who Sunday Service is for*
- *More responsibility to more people – especially young people*
- *Name Badges*
- *Fuzzy Edges – open to things from outside*
- *Watching with Christ*
- *Young people – Bringing together*
- *Get ourselves known outside*
- *Outside worship*
- *“Loneliness” club*
- *What does Wantage need?*
- *Prayer space*
- *Angels*
- *Different kind of music*
- *Youth worker*
- *Church mini Bus*
- *Day time street pastors*
- *Outreach to make the community our church*
- *Specific presence at community events*
- *Youth choir*

Other useful resources to aid our thinking and reflecting

As we continue our conversations there are a number of other resources that are available to help us in our thinking, praying and planning.

You might find what is below helpful as you continue to think about what the future for Wantage Methodist Church might look like.

LEADING TOGETHER IN GROWING METHODIST CHURCHES

Learning from research and practice in the North East of England

“What can the wider Church learn from six selected Methodist churches in the North East of England about the processes and factors which are supporting and inhibiting growth in their context?”

This question was considered in the context of wider debates, including those concerning:

- Rapidly changing social contexts.
- Different views of growth.
- Questions about whether churches have adopted a ‘theology of decline’
- Changing forms and patterns of leadership and ministry, lay and ordained, within these contexts, and how different ministries might best work together.

There were 5 Key themes discovered as part of this research. Churches who found that they were growing had these 5 themes in common

1. Being welcoming, hospitable and caring as a church community
2. Being responsive and actively inclusive of a wider range of people.
3. Making available accessible intentional spiritual development opportunities.
4. Participatory and collaborative leadership.
5. Provision of support which enabled change and overcame barriers.

The full report can be seen and downloaded at

http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/4891/leading_together_final_report.pdf

3GENERATE

In November 2017, 1,000 children and young people met for a weekend together and worshipped, talked, discussed, learnt and laughed together. 3Generate is one of Methodism's current success stories.

Young people from our Church and our Circuit were present and their voices were heard along with all the others.

As part of their time together, they helped to produce the 3Generate Manifesto for 2018

This is a useful addition to our thinking about who we are, where we are going and what the future of the church might look like. It is as challenging as it is prophetic and we should take notice of what they are saying.

They are looking for, working towards and wanting to be part of a church community that:

KEEPS GOD AT THE CENTRE

- Where we do what God asks us to do – love each other.
- Where prayer and engaging with the Bible are central.
- Where sharing our faith stories is encouraged and valued so that we grow closer to God.

IS NOT AFRAID

- To step out in faith and trust God.
- To lead the way on issues of injustice and social action.
- To have difficult conversations on challenging topics.

ALWAYS TAKES ACTION

- By sharing inspiring stories of action and change.
- By challenging injustice.
- By engaging politically e.g. in the debate around nuclear weapons.
- By praying for and responding to those in need e.g. supporting Foodbanks.
- By caring for the environment e.g. using less plastics.

IS RELEVANT

- Where people are equipped to engage with, and respond to, current issues.
- Where worship is engaging.
- Where modern technology is used effectively.
- Where we work towards being environmentally-friendly and sustainable.

IS ABOUT TOGETHERNESS

- Where adults value and support young people.
- Where better relationships are built, through conversations and questions, leading to acceptance, kindness, understanding and mutual respect.
- Where we learn about and understand other faiths.

IS AN INCLUSIVE AND SAFE SPACE

- Where all are welcomed, respected and accepted.
- Where we celebrate uniqueness and difference.
- Where we can have safe, open-minded conversation.
- Where there is support for those with mental health issues.
- Where we can be still, rest and connect with God.

HAS CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED IN ALL ASPECTS OF ITS LIFE

- Where we are trusted.
- Where there are opportunities for us to lead.
- Where our voice is heard and responded to.

Robert Schnase (an American Methodist Bishop) speaks of “**The 5 practices of fruitful congregations**”.

In his book, he identifies and then spells out what these 5 practices are and how they work in practice, albeit in a different cultural setting to us.

1. Radical hospitality
2. Passionate worship
3. Intentional faith development
4. Risk taking mission and service
5. Extravagant generosity